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TOWN-MEETINGS

FLORA J. COOKE

The "Town-Meetings," a term brought by Colonel Parker from his New England up-bringing, was applied to those morning exercises in which there was a democratic discussion of rules, regulations, or needed improvements of school life. Such topics as Conduct in Morning Exercise, Adoption of a School Courtesy Code, Regulations for School Parties, were considered; sometimes the discussions were of wider civic problems as The Policy of Joining, as a School, the Wild Flower Preservation Society, The Formation of a School Humane Society, etc.

Pupils from the third through the twelfth grades take part in the town-meeting discussions. Sometimes the chairman of a committee of pupils presents the question for discussion and gives the report of the committee.

The meetings have always stimulated a sense of social responsibility and have resulted in a better attitude, and always in a sincere, even if short-lived attempt, to live up to the higher standards presented. The full possibility of this form of exercise has not been realized—the children have responded actively and cheerfully to all demands, but they have not, as yet, taken the initiative to any great extent in asking for such meetings and discussions. Parts of two town meetings on morning exercises are given verbatim, because they are typical of the character of the discussions and because they are directly related to the subject-matter of this volume.

MORNING EXERCISE—TOWN-MEETING

Associate Principal. For four years now we have had these morning exercises, and all of you, when you are asked, are more than willing to take part, but the teachers have been responsible. It seems to me the time has come for you to take up the work, and initiate things for yourselves. I think the plans for morning exercises ought to come from you and that the people who are to take part ought to be selected by you. I suggest that a committee of pupils be appointed to select the subjects and carry out the plans.

Douglas (tenth grade). I think that is a splendid idea, and I suggest that a committee of pupils be appointed for a while to select the subjects and carry out the plans themselves. I think the pupils would then take an active interest in the work. I think that not only the High School should have a part in the morning exercise, but that every grade ought to contribute—every pupil in the grades should have a part. I don't mean every day, but I don't think the exercises should be confined to the High School. I think every grade should have a part in it sometime.

Charlotte (eighth grade). I think that such a committee ought not to be from the High School, but that the high-school pupils ought to work with the children from the grades.

Emmons (tenth grade). Would it not be better for each grade to have a committee and the teacher from that grade help out on the exercise? I think it would be better than to have a committee for the whole school.

Beatrice (twelfth grade). Why not have one member of the committee from each grade, and have each in that grade suggest to him what he wants to do?

Fanny (twelfth grade). I think the pupils who have taken an interest in the exercise today would be a good committee, but we need time to think about it.

(New topic introduced as to what pupils enjoy in morning exercise.)

Elmer (tenth grade). I enjoy the morning exercises when different people from around the country come and talk to us.

Katherine (twelfth grade). I think one of the most interesting morning exercises is when the little children take part. It is nice to know what they are doing and what they are thinking about.

Joe (tenth grade). I don't care much about that; it doesn't seem to interest me. I like the exercises that Elmer does, where people from around the country come and talk to us.

Elmer (tenth grade.) But I think it is our duty to come even when we don't enjoy it. It gives the little people a chance to talk before an audience, and that is always a good thing.

Clarence (eleventh grade). The little children say a lot of things that they feel more than the older ones do.

Emmons (tenth grade). I like the morning exercises. It shows us what the other grades do, and I think we ought to know because we hardly—at least I hardly ever look in to see what they are doing in other rooms.

Katherine (twelfth grade). I think that some of the most interesting exercises are the plays that we have had—just acting out a story.

Gene (twelfth grade). I think that one of the differences between the exercises here and at the Normal School is that there they were always prepared, and the exercises here are sometimes just what we think about at the time. I didn't care much for the morning exercises at the Normal.

MORNING EXERCISE—TOWN MEETING

(Fifth Grade through High School)

Charlotte (eighth grade). At the last meeting it was suggested that a committee be appointed to arrange for morning exercises. Claudine thinks that instead of having the committee arrange for the morning exercise, the people who want the exercises should arrange for them and then come to the committee and see when they can have them.

Elizabeth (eleventh grade). I should think that each of the grades ought to have a committee and let the committee for each grade decide on the date for the various exercises.

Elliot (tenth grade). That is just about what we have been doing. There has been a bulletin that said that on each day some teacher would give a morning exercise. That is just what has been done, and it has not been a success.

Winifred (eleventh grade). I think each grade should be represented, and then we could ask the teachers for their advice.

Katherine (twelfth grade). I think it would be well to have one of the teachers on the committee until we get started. They have had more experience and have better judgment.

Eighth grade teacher. We have a committee of teachers who have been working very long hours on these very things. I think that many of you would like to hear the report of this committee on what they consider the great principles involved in the morning exercise. The first is: "The success of the morning exercise is fundamentally dependent upon a good community-spirit in all the classes." What do you think that means?

Chester (twelfth grade). What I think you mean is that instead of the morning exercises being formal, some certain people saying a lot of things that they have prepared, that each one is to say what he has to say and not be afraid, and that everything, no matter what it is, should be of interest to everybody else.

Elizabeth (eleventh grade). It seems to me to mean that everybody puts in his efforts for the whole body of children, and not each individual for himself, so that everyone will get the benefit of it.

A teacher read the rest of the report but there were no further remarks by the pupils.

Elliot. I do not think a committee such as has been suggested could have exercises every morning in the week—I believe it would be a little too much to get ready. I know in our debating society it is hard to find subjects, and it only comes every two weeks. If we had a committee of teachers it would help us very greatly.

Elizabeth. As I understand it, the committee was not to decide, but to let each grade select its subject. I think a good way to do would be to have a whole school feel the responsibility of the morning exercises and consider themselves a committee, and when they have something to give, put it down for a specified time.

Elmer (eleventh grade). Is that the object of the committee—just to keep the calendar? Suppose, when the calendar was submitted to the committee, there were five or six open mornings in the month, would it be sensible for the committee to try to fill them? Could the committee ask anybody to be responsible at any time?

Charlotte. I think the whole school ought to be together every morning. It seems to me it would be a good thing for the committee to have some general subjects which would be interesting to every one, and if there was an open morning, just go around and announce it to the different grades and have them think about it.

Paul (eleventh grade). I think we ought to have a representative from each grade in the school and some of the teachers. Hold the whole school responsible for the exercises and then the committee could make arrangements for the open mornings.

Beatrice (twelfth grade). I think that two committees would be rather confusing. I should think we could have a smaller committee, say six, three teachers, and three of the pupils from the upper grades—one from the fifth, one from the sixth, and one from the seventh, and then two others, one from the eighth grade, and one from the High School. Have the grades themselves elect the committee, and have the committee changed from time to time, so that everyone would have a chance to work.

Lucy (fifth grade). I think it would be better to just have one committee; have the whole school suggest and the committee carry it out.

Gene (twelfth grade). I would have the children from the fifth grade up elect these members of the committee, no matter from what grade they were elected. What we are working for, is to make everyone responsible for the morning exercises. I make a motion that three representatives be elected by the grades, from the fifth grade up, and that three members of the faculty be elected by the faculty, and that this committee of six arrange all the dates for the morning exercises and all the school be responsible for the subjects.

(This motion was seconded and carried.)

NOTE: Since the establishment of student government such discussions have grown more largely from the initiative of the older children and have been dealt with in the student government meetings. The younger children have devoted some divided morning exercises to such discussion, and individual grades use a similar plan to develop social consciousness.